



CALIFORNIA WATER BOARDS

State Water Resources Control Board Regional Water Quality Control Boards

Water Board Function: Plans and policies

Water Board Program(s) Relevant to Function:

Basin Planning
Statewide Plans and Policies

Problem/Issue Description:

- Effective regulatory programs require the development of plans and policies to ensure that the planning and coordination necessary for a well-functioning regulatory process occurs, and to help make the regulatory process more accessible to the public. Plans and policies clarify intent, provide guidelines and direction on carrying out activities, and promote consistency where appropriate.
- The Regional Board Basin Plans, Statewide Plans, and Policies (collectively “Plans and Policies”) contain the water quality regulations to protect the quality of the State’s waters.
- These plans and policies, which are the basis for the Boards’ regulatory programs, may specify water quality standards or affect their implementation. Both the State Board and Regional Boards may adopt policies, separate from the Basin Plans, that provide detailed direction on the implementation of certain plan provisions and help to communicate regulations.

Overview of Function:

- The plans and policies are the foundations on which permit and enforcement actions are based.
- Collectively, the plans and policies describe the beneficial uses of the waters and the quality of the waters necessary to maintain or attain the use.
- Regional Water Board Plans and Policies must be consistent with the State Water Board (Statewide) Plans and Policies.

Role of Water Board Staff:

- Water Board staff prepare recommendations for new or amendments to regional or statewide plans and policies.
- Water Board staff prepare the scientific justification to support the adoption of new or amended plans and policies.
- Water Board staff solicit stakeholder input in developing or amending plans and policies.
- Water Board staff present recommendations to their respective boards for Board consideration.

Regarding Basin Plans: Regional Board staff drafts plan (with CEQA compliance) for consideration of adoption by Regional Board. State Board staff reviews adopted plan and advises State Board on approval or remand of plan.

Regarding Statewide Plans: State Board staff solicits Regional Board staff input and drafts plan (with CEQA compliance) for consideration of adoption by State Board.

Role of Regional Board Members:

Provide broad policy direction to staff within regional boundaries, review proposals, conduct public hearings, and adopt plans and standards.

- Regional Water Board Members act on the staff recommendations, after a public hearing, to adopt or amend Regional Water Board Plans and Policies.
- Regional Water Board Members set priorities (through the triennial review process) for revising or adopting new Regional Water Board Plans and Policies.
- Regional Water Board Members may comment on, or request the amendment or adoption of, new Statewide Plans and Policies.

Role of State Board Members:

Provide broad policy direction to staff for State policies, review proposed statewide plans and standards, conduct public hearings for statewide plans and policies, and approve or remand for further action Regional Board plans and standards. Regarding Statewide Plans, direct State Board staff, conduct public hearings, and adopt plans. Regarding Basin Plans, review and approve or remand adopted plan.

- State Water Board Members act on the staff recommendations, after a public hearing, to adopt or amend State Water Board Plans and Policies.
- State Water Board Members set priorities (through the triennial review process) for revising or adopting new State Water Board Plans and Policies.
- State Water Board Members may comment on, or request the amendment or adoption of, new Regional Water Board Plans and Policies.
- State Water Board Members must approve any revision or adoption of a Regional Water Board Plan or Policies and should ensure that they are consistent with the State Wide Plans and Policies.

Primary Issues of Concern:

- Out-of-date plans and policies can result in regulations that are over or under protective.
- Out-of-date plans and policies can result in contentious permits, TMDLs, and enforcement actions, and may put an undue burden on the regulated community or conversely allow pristine waters to be degraded.

Definition of Key Terms:

None.